ORV Planning Update to State ORV Advisory Board

Dr. Chuck Nelson

October 29, 2004

I facilitated the following meetings late this summer and in the early fall to advance the update of the Michigan ORV Plan. I have included key points from each meeting. I was informed that you had a very substantial agenda for November 10, 2004 and that a brief written report was the best way to communicate progress. This report is to fulfill that request. I am now writing the draft plan update and hope to first publicly present it at a State ORV Advisory Board meeting in early February 2005 after initial internal review by DNR. The DNR is considering another series of public meetings across the state to get citizen comment on the draft plan in early Spring 2005. The surveys to other states regarding their plans, northern Lower Peninsula and Upper Peninsula County Road Commission managers and statewide to Michigan County Sheriffs are almost complete. Finally, a hearty thank you to Dick Ranney for his assistance as time keeper at the public information meetings and to Steve Kubisiak for reserving the venues. Enjoy your fall!

DNR Meetings

8/26 FMFM Supervisors and Management Team

- Nelson presented format, timetable for plan update and reviewed history of ORV program, use and user studies
- Suggestion that regional meetings should be held with FMFM to get maximum field input

10/14 NLP FMFM Unit Managers + 50s + Trail and Rec. Specialists + Law Enforcement and Wildlife Division Reps

- Significant concern about ORV damage/conflicts such as illegal use off designated system, erosion from illegal use near surface waters and excessive noise
  - Noted that the highest mandate to DNR is to protect the lands and waters of Michigan from pollution or impairment
- Shortage of personnel dedicated to recreation
  - Would strongly support 100% recreation dedicated personnel in each management unit
- Supportive of placing ORV events on selected sites to be harvested 2-3 years out
- Support better connecting ORV trail system to towns for goods/services
- Need to upgrade ORV maps ASAP
- Strongly support AuSable Pilot Program yellow backers
- Concern about too much "red tape" to modify (e.g. reroute) ORV trails
- Strongly support current closed unless posted open approach on state forests

10/15 UP FMFM Unit Managers and 50s

- Shortage of personnel dedicated to recreation
  - Would strongly support 100% recreation dedicated personnel in each management unit
- Support better connecting ORV trail system to towns for goods/services
- ORV grant program viewed as more complex, than snowmobile program
- Need one standard for ORV/snowmobile signage (e.g. nationwide standard such as that used by Forest Service)
- Want to expand designated system in UP
  - Target needs of tourists who want to ride significant distances for multiple days like snowmobile
- Not in favor of a closed unless posted open system in UP
- Concerned about significant illegal cross country travel
  - Perceived by hunters and anglers
  - Causing substantial environmental damage, creating new, unauthorized roads
- Need voluntary assumption of risk language in ORV act
- Concern about "red tape" and amount of paperwork with ORV program

Stakeholder Workshops

9/16 Restoration grant recipients – 11 attended

- Engineering requirements are challenging
- Need better ID of ORV damage sites off trails
- Need more restoration interests involved

9/21 Trail maintenance grant recipients – 21 attended

- Support for improved signage
  - Yellow backers from AuSable Pilot Project
  - Sign plan removing discretion for sponsors
- Significant concern about liability associated with maintenance activities
- Growing trail use = more trail maintenance
- Costs higher than reimbursement for most
- Support gas sales tax money to ORV program

10/11 Oscoda Co. local government/citizens – 31 attended, no signup sheet

- Variety of viewpoints about opening county road shoulders to non-SOS registered, DNR licensed ORVs
  - Key to distinguish between targeted access from towns to trail system vs. county-wide approach
  - Most in support of opening to support targeted town/trail access, greater division about opening county-wide

Public Information Meetings

10/12 Lansing – 92 signed attendance sheet

- Three distinct user groups represented
  - Motorcycles, ATV, full size truck/dune buggy
  - Non-trail oriented users not well represented
- Want separate trails to meet differing user needs
  - More trails in total
  - Parallel trails, "play" areas for large trucks
  - Many want NLP forest roads open to MC/ATV
  - Stated need for trail restoration, relocation
- Want direct access from trails to goods/services
- Support using gas sales tax $ from ORV for ORV
- Support hands on & written youth ORV safety ed.
- Concerns about liability, discretion regarding trail maintenance similar to trail maintenance workshop

10/13 Grayling – 63 signed attendance sheet

- Three distinct groups represented plus 56" width ATV
  - Gator, Mule, etc.
  - Non-trail oriented users not well represented
- Want separate trails to meet differing user needs
  - More trails in total
  - Parallel trails, "play" areas for large trucks
  - Many want NLP forest roads open to MC/ATV
  - Stated need for trail restoration, relocation
- Want direct access from trails to goods/services
- Support using gas sales tax $ from ORV for ORV
- Support hands on & written youth ORV safety ed
- Concerns about liability, discretion regarding trail maintenance similar to trail maintenance workshop

10/14 Marquette – 100 signed attendance sheet

- Different character than previous meetings
  - Three ORV vehicle types represented
  - Also had vocal non-ORV riders concerned about trespass, property and environmental damage, cross-country use & beach riding
  - Also had hunt/fish/pick non-trail riders
- Keep state/national forest roads open to ORV
- Support county road shoulders open to ORV
- ORV riders seen as major component of tourism
  - Want more designated trails for tourists
- Support for ORV education focused on written to reach more youth, support working through sheriffs
- Want sign compatibility with snowmobile program